


Williston Walker

The
First Ecological Society
in Hartford

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THE

First Ecclesiastical Society

IN HARTFORD

1670-1903



AN ADDRESS BY

WILLISTON WALKER

ON THE OCCASION OF
THE TRANSFER OF ITS
PROPERTY TO THE . . .

First Church of Christ in Hartford

MARCH 19, 1903



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THE occasion on which we are met is certainly one of significance. The dissolution of a venerable corporation that has served its Church and its community probably for two hundred and thirty-three years, is an episode of no ordinary moment. It marks the termination of a relationship begun in the early days of this commonwealth and creditably continued through successive generations to the present hour. If the Ecclesiastical Society—the transfer of whose property and rights to the First Church of Hartford we commemorate to-night—has ceased to be the necessity that it once appeared for the maintenance of the temporal interests of the Church, and seems therefore no longer desirable, we recognize, nevertheless, that it has served this Church long and well, and is deserving of grateful remembrance on this occasion. We remember, also, however, that the matter of fundamental importance for which the First Church of Christ stands in this Hartford community is the maintenance and development of the Kingdom of God through the worship, the sacraments, and the spiritual life of those who are associated in or influenced by its fellowship. And hence any organizations or devices by which the expenses of the Church are met, and its secular business managed, have simply a secondary and incidental importance in the accomplishment of the work which the Church aims to do. The Church is the permanent and vitally essential institution; the Society is but a means by which, during part of its history, the Church has sought to accomplish one branch of its work.

The ecclesiastical society is characteristically a New England device. A great variety of methods have been employed to provide for the support of Christian institutions since the time that the Apostles gathered together in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, and those among the believers who had property sold it for the benefit of their fellow disciples and the maintenance of the life of worship and service in common. Paul counseled his converts to the new faith to give on the first day of the week as the Lord had prospered them; and though the gifts for which he asks were primarily for the poor saints at Jerusalem, to whom he wished to take his great collection expressive of the indebtedness of the Gentile churches to them, one cannot doubt that a similar voluntary method was employed to meet the expenses of the early churches. We have evidence that this free system appealed strongly to the Christians of the first and second centuries as part of the liberty of the Gospel. As the Church grew, and especially after the Roman Empire was converted to the support of Christianity as the official religion, it became a great property holder, and the Jewish system of tithes was regarded, from the fourth century onward, with increasing approval, as a law binding upon all Christian people. This two-fold system of support from property and from tithes continued through the Middle Ages, and was that in use in England at the time that the Puritan founders of Hartford separated from the English Establishment. But this method of providing for the support of the Christian ministry and worship was one of the features of contemporary religious life which the earliest Congregationalists of England rejected. The "separatists" who organized the Pilgrim congregation at Scrooby, lived in exile in Leyden, and founded Plymouth, believed, like the Christians of the first and second centuries, that the support of the Gospel should be by the

voluntary gifts of its disciples. The Puritans who founded the other Congregational colonies of New England, at first had no such conviction; and one of the early acts of the Massachusetts Company in its endeavor to foster the spiritual welfare of the colonists who were to cross the Atlantic was to provide at public charge for the support of their ministers and the erection of meeting houses in the new land. But here, as in so many other matters of ecclesiastical organization in early New England, Plymouth example triumphed, and for a time all the Congregational colonies practiced the voluntary method of meeting the expenses incident to the maintenance of public worship.

Yet this voluntary system soon proved to have serious disadvantages. The expenses incident to the building of meeting houses and to the maintenance of the numerous salaried officers, -- "pastor," "teacher" and "ruling elder," -- which their reading of the New Testament led them to deem necessary for the proper organization of the Church, proved exceedingly burdensome to communities the means of which at best were extremely limited. Not all men were generous or gave in proportion to their abilities. Furthermore, since Massachusetts, by a law of March 4, 1635, had required attendance at Church under penalty of a fine, it seemed but just to the colonists of that day "that not only members of churches but all that are taught in the Word, are to contribute unto him that teacheth." So serious was the question which the inadequacy of the voluntary method forced upon the consideration of the Massachusetts authorities, that Governor Winthrop proposed its discussion by the Synod which met at Cambridge in August, 1637. But the ministers who there gathered refused to debate it lest they should be thought self-seeking. In November following, however, the Massachusetts Legislature sent a circular letter to the

several churches asking their advice as to the desirability of adopting some other method of ministerial maintenance; and the result was the passage of a law in September, 1638, by which "Evry inhabitant in any towne . . . who shall not volentarily contribute, proportionably to his ability, wth other freemen of the same towne, to all comon charges, as well for vpholding the ordinances in the churches as otherwise, shalbee compelled thereto by assessment & distres to bee levied by the cunstable." This law, though preserving the principle of voluntaryism in appearance at least, really changed the support of the ministry and the payment of Church expenses from a charge met by voluntary gifts to one collectible by taxation. Public sentiment prevented its enforcement in a few places, notably in Boston, where the voluntary system continued until it was supplanted, in the eighteenth century, by the rental of pews. In Boston, taxation for ministerial support never obtained a foothold; but in other Massachusetts towns it became the established system. The same difficulties which were met in Massachusetts soon led the other colonies to abandon the voluntary system. The Commissioners of the United Colonies, in September, 1644, evidently moved by Massachusetts example, recommended the several associated governments to pass laws "that eurie man voluntarily set downe what he is willing to alowe to that end & vse [ministerial support], and if any man refuse to pay a meet p'porcon, that then hee be rated by authority in some iust & equall way, and if after this any man withhould or delay due paymt the ciuill power to be exercised as in other iust debts." Thus invited, Connecticut enacted this recommendation into a statute on October 25, 1644. New Haven had a like requirement by 1656, and probably several years earlier; and even Plymouth, whose example had established the volun-

tary system in New England, was induced to pass a similar, though somewhat milder, statute, in June, 1655.

These laws were modified and strengthened from time to time; and, in November, 1647, the Massachusetts Legislature ordered that when parsonages should be built by vote of the inhabitants in any town, the cost should be duly levied upon the taxpayers. With the course of time, the appearance of voluntarism which had at first been preserved was abandoned; and the Connecticut Statute of May, 1697, frankly provided that church expenses:—

“shall be levied and assessed on the severall inhabitants in each town or plantation according to their respective estates as from time to time they shall be in the genll list or lists of the persons and estates of the inhabitants of each town or plantation, and in such species, viz.: wheat, indian corn, rie and pork, and in such proportion and prizes of ye species as shall from year to year be settled by the Genll Court for the payment of the ministers rates, or in money; which said sumes or payments shall be collected by such person or persons as the respective townes shall from year to year choose and appoint for that end. . . . And if any person or persons so assessed being demanded the said payments levied on them shall refuse or neglect to pay in the same . . . the Assist or Comissioner shall issue forth his warrant to the constable or constables of the town or to the collectors where such neglect of payments shall be, to distrein the same payment or payments out of the estate or estates of the person or persons so refusing or neglecting to pay.”

The effect of this statute was to make the support of the Gospel a town charge; and the money to be collected was appointed by town vote and raised by taxation like any other common expense. It is easy to see that such a situation was a relatively simple one when a single congregation existed within the boundaries of a town. The same body of legal voters which deliberated upon and appropriated taxes to meet the other expenses of the community could take counsel concerning

the maintenance of the church; and we find a number of instances of such votes in the Hartford Town Records when as yet only one church existed in this Hartford community. Thus, in March, 1640, the town ordered an addition of five pounds to the salary of Rev. Samuel Stone, the "teacher" of this Hartford Church. Ordinarily, however, the town seems to have regarded ministers' salaries as existing contracts to be met year by year, as illustrated in this vote, of December 7, 1661:—

"Ye towne granted ye same stipend or allowance to Mr. Stone and Mr. Whiteinge as ye last yere & orded ye rate makers apoynted to make rates as formerly."

The death of Mr. Stone, in July, 1663, brought up, of course, the question of what compensation was to be paid for his services during the fraction of the year preceding his decease; and we find the Hartford town meeting of January 26, 1664, voting to his widow "sixty pownds" and to his colleague "Mr. Whitting eighty pownds." The settlement of Rev. Joseph Haynes, in 1664, as colleague with Rev. John Whiting in the pastorate of this Church is reflected that year in the town records by a vote of seventy pounds "for his suruise in the ministry."

From time to time onward, until 1670, frequent votes determining the salaries of the colleague pastorates for the year appear in the Hartford Town Records. In that year they cease abruptly. The reason was undoubtedly the formation of two ecclesiastical Societies in Hartford because of the division of the mother church of the town, completed by the formation of the Second Church, on February 22, 1670, as we should now reckon the date. Though the extant records of our First Ecclesiastical Society begin in 1683, there seems to be no reason to doubt that its year of birth was that of the division

of the Church (1670), and that it was the questions of taxation raised by the formation of another church in Hartford that brought it into existence. That which had been the concern of the whole town when but one church existed in this community became the interest of only part of the inhabitants when the religious forces were divided. And as a town may be divided at the present day into school districts each taxing itself for the support of public instruction, so in 1670 the maintenance of public worship became the concern of two societies including, between them, all the inhabitants of the town, who now discussed in their separate society meetings those ecclesiastical questions which before the division had been determined by the whole body of legal voters assembled in town meeting. The First Ecclesiastical Society was simply the legal voters attached to the First Church met together to provide for its temporal necessities.

Though no legislative authorization for the formation of this Society has been preserved, the existence of societies in the colony is clearly indicated in the Connecticut statutes contained in the "Book of the General Laws" in 1672-3. This enactment ordered that

"where there is more than one Assembly in a Town they shall severally meet to Consider and determine [the minister's salary] as aforesaid, and all persons shall Contribute to one or both of those Societies within their Township."

It appears that lands were divided for taxing purposes between the two societies according to the elective affinity of their owners. Such an assignment is contemplated in the Connecticut law of October, 1676, which provided:—

"that where there are more then one assemblies in a towne . . . the severall inhabitants shall pay towards the minister's mayntenance of one or both their societies as foloweth, viz. : if they shall choose to pay to

one, they shall pay in full proportion with the rest of that societie; if not, they shall pay to both societies; the one halfe of every such persons estate shall be rated with the people of one society, and the other halfe of their estates with those of the other societie, in full proportion with their neighbours of each societie."

This system of assignment by the owner's choice was soon modified in a way that is illustrated by the only instance contained in the first volume of "Hartford Town Votes" in which the town as a whole passed laws upon ecclesiastical finance after the dividing year 1670. When, in 1694, the inhabitants on the east side of the river, in what is now East Hartford, had secured the countenance of the Legislature for the establishment of religious institutions of their own, the members of the two Hartford societies got together in town meeting and passed a grudging vote to the effect:—

"that all the Land on the East side [of the Connecticut] that Belongs to any of the people of west side Shall pay to the ministry of the west side and that all the Land on the west side shall pay to the minister of the west side tho it Belongs to the people of the East side."

The tendency to make location rather than the choice of the owner the determining factor in the incidence of taxation evidently grew as the seventeenth century drew to a close; and in October, 1699, the Legislature ordered:—

"that where this Court hath determined the bounds and limits of any societie in any town or plantation in this Colonie where there are more than one societie, that in every such case all persons living within those bounds and limits and their estates lying within the same shall be rateable according to law for the support and maintainance of the ministrie of that societie, any lawe, usage or custome to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding."

But it would not appear that in Hartford a hard and fast geographical line was ever drawn between the First and Second Societies by legal authority.

By the time our Ecclesiastical Society was being formed, a further question was coming into prominence in New England, which naturally arose out of the share of the legal voters of a society or town in the payment of church expenses and the assessment of taxes by which those expenses were met. If these men were responsible for the support of the minister whether they were members of the Church or not, ought they not to have some share in the choice of the minister that they were bound to support? Was it right that there should be "taxation without representation"?—to quote the New England principle which the Revolution was to put into the fore-front of political discussion. This question was of little importance in early Massachusetts since there, from 1631 to 1664, all legal voters were Church members; nor was it of concern in early New Haven, for, as in Massachusetts, the franchise was there restricted to church members until 1665. In Connecticut Colony no such limitation ever had place. And we find the inhabitants of Connecticut towns, whether Church members or not, possessed of a voice in the choice of their ministers at a comparatively early period. In October, 1666, the Connecticut Legislature proposed for the consideration of a "Synod," which was planned for the following May, the query:—

"whether it doth not belong to ye body of a Towne collectively, taken joyntly, to call him to be their minister whom the Church shal choose to be their officer."

Though the failure of the "Synod" to meet prevented an answer by the Connecticut churches to the Legislature's enquiry, its own actions gave an interpretation within a year. On October 10, 1667, the Connecticut General Court ordered all freemen and householders of the town of Windsor to meet and to determine by vote whether they would have Rev. Nathaniel

Chauncey as their minister or not. In this action no distinction was made between those who were members of the Church and those outside its covenant.

The right of those who assessed and paid taxes, thus to share in the choice of the minister was one evidently demanded by the spirit of the time, and though the Massachusetts Legislature, in 1668, forbade any but Church members in full communion to share in the selection of their minister, the tide was too strong to be resisted in that colony also, and the townspeople exercised the right of choice irrespective of the question of their Church membership, at Salem in 1672, and at Dedham in 1685. Massachusetts, in 1692-3, enacted a general statute ordering that the choice of a minister should be by the Church, and that that selection should then be ratified or rejected by the legal voters, who should fix and raise the minister's salary. And, in 1708, the Connecticut Legislature went so far as to provide: —

“ that the major part of the inhabitants of any town, plantation, or societie, qualified as the law directs to vote in all other town affairs, or are members in full communion with the church in the said town or societie, that shall be present at a town or societie meeting legally warned, shall have power by the major vote of them so met to call and settle a minister; and the minister so called and settled shall be the minister of such town or societie, any law, usage, or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.”

There is every reason to believe, therefore, that all legal voters of our Society had a voice in the choice of their minister from the first. Its early relations to the Church seem to have been cordial and to have foreshadowed that harmony of co-öperation which has always characterized the connection of the two bodies in Hartford. The vote of November 24, 1682, fixing the salary of Rev. Timothy Woodbridge then just settled, at one hundred pounds, is described in the Society's records as passed at “ a meeting of the First Church and congregation in

Hartford," and the Society had had a share—just how extensive it is hard to say—in the negotiations which had led to Mr. Woodbridge's settlement.

Indeed the tendency of custom, as well as the practical effect of the legislation which has been noted, was to give the Society during the eighteenth century, in many parts of Connecticut, not merely a share, but the leading part in the choice of the minister. This was conspicuously the case in the eastern portion of the colony; and it had its illustration as late as 1825, in so important a church as the First Church of New Haven, where the choice of Rev. Leonard Bacon as pastor was effected by the Society and ratified by the Church. Absence of record in the case of our Church makes it impossible definitely to affirm what the eighteenth century practice here was; but, it *looks* as if the Society here was the leader in the settlement of Rev. Daniel Wadsworth in 1732, of Rev. Edward Dorr in 1747-8, and of Rev. Nathan Strong in 1774. When Rev. Joel Hawes was chosen pastor of this Church in 1818 the Church acted first. The Society concurred in the choice a week later. This order of procedure observed in Hawes's settlement has continued to be the usage of the First Church and Society, and certainly since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been thought to be far more Congregational than to have the society take the initiative. It corresponds not merely with the practice of early New England, but with the significance which the Church itself should possess in the administration of affairs of such spiritual importance as the choice of a pastor. Regarding such more thoroughly business problems as the erection of a meeting-house or of other buildings for public worship, their care, maintenance and development, the Society has always led, since a Society has been connected with this Church.

In the State-Church system under which societies came into being, all taxpayers were, as we have seen, bound to contribute to the expenses of the Gospel, and unless specially exempt were deemed members of the Congregational society within the boundaries of which they resided. Exemption from payment to the support of the Congregational ministry was thus an exception, and an exception not acquired without effort. The Episcopalians of Connecticut gained such exemption in 1727, and two years later it was extended to Quakers and Baptists; but it applied to representatives of these unestablished polities only where actual congregations existed which those who sought exemption could attend, and any who availed themselves of this right were ultimately compelled to abjure allegiance to the established Congregational order by lodging with the town clerk a formal renunciation of connection with the Congregational Society and of association with their new fellowship. They had to pay at least as much in taxes for the support of the worship which they preferred as would have been assessed upon them for the maintenance of the Congregational establishment, lest their renunciation of its support should be for pecuniary advantage rather than by reason of religious conviction.

The difficulties of escape from payment for the support of Congregational public worship and the consequent countenance thus given to the churches of the Congregational order at the expense of other forms of faith was felt to be a great grievance; and, in the increasing spirit of independence from churchly control, it was felt equally to be a grievance by many at the beginning of the nineteenth century to have to pay for the support of ecclesiastical institutions at all. The party which desired to do away with the ancient state of affairs grew rapidly during the opening years of the nineteenth century and effected a complete revolution, in 1818, when a new Constitution for Connecticut

was adopted, which still remains in force. By this Constitution all support of religion within the boundaries of this State became voluntary, and all religious organizations were placed on an equality before the law. The society ceased to be a state institution. It survived, but as a voluntary partnership or association. Yet the framers of our Constitution were true to the reputation of the State of Connecticut as a "land of steady habits," and they desired that the change which the Constitution effected should be accomplished with as little violence as possible. Hence the Constitution provided that all persons should remain members of the society to which they then belonged, unless they formally gave notice to its clerk of their withdrawal from its fellowship. Thus the old State-supported society passed quietly and without friction over into the voluntary association as a consequence of the adoption of the Connecticut Constitution of 1818. But though now a voluntary organization, a Connecticut ecclesiastical society, under the Constitution, had, and still has, full legal right to assess and collect a tax upon its members by a majority vote of a duly warned meeting. The property of all of its members is liable for its taxes and debts. But a method of raising money, so similar to the taxation imposed by public authority for State expenses, has proved itself increasingly unpopular, and has been seldom, if ever, resorted to of late years in Connecticut. It was enforced, however, in our Society for some years after the adoption of the Connecticut State Constitution, and it was not until 1847 that our Society began meeting its expenses by assessment upon the pews.

In Massachusetts a similar controversy in the early years of the nineteenth century precipitated a curious discussion involving the rights of ecclesiastical societies, from which Connecticut was fortunately exempt. The section of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, known as the "Bill of Rights," had been adopted

nearly a generation before the Unitarian controversy began, and, of course, without any thought of that discussion in the minds of its framers. It had provided that "the several towns, parishes, precincts, and other bodies politic, or religious societies," should "have the exclusive right of electing their public teachers." These expressions were certainly indefinite, and there seems to be reason to believe that the words "religious societies" and "public teachers" were simply rather elaborate eighteenth century circumlocutions to avoid the commoner and simpler expressions, "churches" and "ministers." However this may have been, the interpretation given to this Constitution by the celebrated Dedham case, in 1820, constituted one of the reckoning points of the history of ecclesiastical societies. That case arose in this way. In 1818, Rev. Alvan Lamson, a minister of Unitarian sympathies, was called to the pastorate at Dedham by the votes of a minority of the church members and of a decided majority of the members of the parish. A majority of the church opposed his settlement. The church was evidently divided, and the legal question then arose which faction—the majority or minority—was the church of Dedham, and as such, entitled to the use of the property, the title of which stood in the name of the ecclesiastical society. After a trial, in 1820, notable for the conspicuity of the counsel who argued the case, the legal questions being presented by Daniel Webster and Theron Metcalf before the full court, presided over by Chief Justice Isaac Parker, the Supreme Court of Massachusetts decided that a church had no legal existence save in connection with an ecclesiastical society; and that, should a dispute arise within a church, that faction, however large, was the church, and entitled to the use of the property of the society which a majority of the society should recognize. This left to the ecclesiastical society the determination, very largely, of the religious

complexion of the congregation the temporal interests of which it was organized to serve. No such serious dispute occurred in Connecticut. But there has been not a little recent discussion of the necessity or desirability of ecclesiastical societies, under the altered conditions of the present, so unlike those which obtained when they were originally called into being. Our National Council debated the matter in 1877, and in 1880; and legislative action has now made the formation of a church without a society possible in all the New England States.

Our First Ecclesiastical Society has had relatively an uneventful history. It is to its credit that the interest which it excites is antiquarian rather than historical. It has been a harmonious body. It has never had a quarrel with the Church which it has so long served. In its own internal relations it has manifested good feeling and unity. The only considerable difference of opinion which has marked its history was when it built the second meeting-house which this Church has occupied, after the old structure on the Post Office Square had served its usefulness. Discussions begun in 1727 were continued until the new edifice was erected in 1739, nearly on the site where our present house of worship stands. These disputes as to where the structure should be built, on which side of a street it should be placed, and of the relative desirability of various sites suggested, form a curious episode, as well as the only important controversy, in the history of our Society. But it is evident that the majority choose well, for the First Ecclesiastical Society has been satisfied with the site selected for more than one hundred and sixty years past. When with the growth of Hartford and the decay of the wooden meeting-house of 1739, larger quarters were necessary, the Society determined, in 1805, this time peacefully and harmoniously, to build once more on the site, the selection of which had once involved so much dispute, and to

this decision was due the completion of the present noble edifice, in 1807. It was not quite in its present appearance, however, that this structure in which we are assembled met the eyes of those who attended its dedication. It had not the recess behind the pulpit, nor the arched roof over our heads, nor the organ. No means of heating relieved the cold of winter until the Society voted to permit the introduction of stoves in 1815. No carpets deadened the sound of foot-falls in its aisles until 1839. Square pews were erected about its sides; and the galleries, which still seem so lofty, were five feet higher than they are at present; while the pulpit was at a height sufficiently greater than its present altitude to command not merely the congregation below but the loftier galleries as well. The year 1835 saw the lowering of the galleries, and extensive alterations, in 1852, brought the whole interior of the house of worship substantially into its present form, except for the windows and tablets which commemorate so many who have served this church well and whose memories are held in deserved honor.

Our Society has not been unresponsive to the increasing needs of church life as newer forms of religious activity have developed. A meeting-house was sufficient for public worship until the beginning of the nineteenth century. No evening prayer-meeting was held in Hartford under the auspices of the Church as a whole until 1798, and no Sunday-School gathered the children under its instruction until 1818. But, with the demand which these new agencies for Christian life and nurture made, the Society supplied the need. The year 1813 saw the foundations of a "Conference Building" laid on a lot near Temple Street; and its full use for the mid-week lecture and other meetings probably began early in 1814. Within its walls, one of the four Sunday-Schools organized for the city at the introduction of the Sunday-School into Hartford, met in 1818.

But this building proved inadequate for the growing needs of the congregation, and in 1831-32 the present Lecture-Room was obtained. To it the parlors in which so many of our evening meetings are held were added in 1875. Nor has it been in the study of the wants of the congregation alone that the Society has always shown a generous interest. The improvement of its property and its surroundings have been increasingly its concern, as illustrated conspicuously of recent years in the renovation of Gold Street.

Our Ecclesiastical Society has had a conspicuous part in the development of the musical services of the Church. Its interest in church music began early. New England thought at the time of its organization opposed the use in public worship of any but versified portions of Holy Writ. The uninspired hymn was rejected, and the absence of books in which the tunes were printed led to singing by memory, or "rote" as it was called, with the result that such local modifications were made in music that the same tune was often scarcely recognizable as used in adjacent parishes. The best that Cotton Mather could say of the singing of New England in his day was that it was "*not worse* than what is [heard] in many other parts of the World." But the early eighteenth century saw an effort for reform, and this region of Connecticut was agitated (1727-1732) over singing by "rote" or by "rule." To some it seemed as if the introduction of the tune-book would be but the first step in a process the logical completion of which would be the introduction of the Prayer-Book and the imposition of the Liturgy which the founders of New England thought themselves to have escaped by crossing the Atlantic; but our Society had no such fears, though it moved with its customary caution. On June 20, 1733, it voted that, after three months' practice by such members of the congregation as inclined to sing by "rule," the new method

should be tried until the annual meeting of December, and then a further vote should be taken on the propriety of its continuance. The innovation proved its permanent value. So, too, the uninspired hymn, which had conquered its place in the esteem of our churches by reason of the poetic genius with which Isaac Watts expressed the aspirations, hopes and praises of Christian people, found its place in our public worship through the vote of the Ecclesiastical Society. In 1756, it expressed its judgment "that Dr. Watts' Psalms may be sung in the Congregation at the time of Divine Worship at least half ye time." Nearly three-quarters of a century later, the Society countenanced another musical innovation, admitting the organ which early New England usage had rejected. In 1822, a small instrument was installed by voluntary subscription; but this organ proved inadequate and was replaced, in 1833, by one purchased by the Society by "a tax on the polls and ratable estates of the inhabitants of the Society"; and it, in turn, gave way, by gift, to the present organ, in 1883, after half a century of useful service.

The Society had its burden of perplexities in all the changes of value characteristic of the fluctuating paper money of the eighteenth century. Rev. Timothy Woodbridge had been settled, in 1684, at a salary of one hundred pounds; but by 1731 it took one hundred and fifty pounds in paper money to equal the amount. Rev. Daniel Wadsworth received payment, in 1732, in one hundred thirty pounds of bills, as they then stood; but, by 1747, it took four hundred pounds in paper currency to discharge the indebtedness. Rev. Edward Dorr was settled in 1748 at seventy pounds of silver and his firewood; but the account book which he kept, and which has come down to us, shows that he was paid largely "in kind," and for the most part directly by the members of the Society,

with many of whom he kept separate accounts. Nor has the Society been without its fair share of worldly shrewdness, and, at times, almost of business unscrupulousness. In 1682, John Holloway gave lands, now on North Main Street, with the express provision that they should belong to the Church forever. They do so in a sense; but I am sorry to say that the Society rented these lands in May, 1774, during the business stringency brought about by the political and commercial difficulties just preceding the Revolutionary War, for the lump sum of one hundred and forty-one pounds and fifteen shillings and "one wheat corn on the first Monday of January" for nine hundred years. Those of our successors in the First Church who are here, and we may trust that many will be here, in 2674, may re-enter into possession of the land which the Society thus practically alienated. Nor was this the only instance in which the Society thus made void the real intent of its benefactors. A parcel of three acres of pine lands, given by the same John Holloway, was similarly rented, in 1759, for a single payment of fifteen pounds, and a silver penny a year, until 2758. I have not heard that our Treasurer has collected the rent in recent years.

But, taken as a whole, the record of the Society, business-wise and in all other respects, is a very honorable one. Of how much faithful, unpaid service it has been the recipient. To mention a few only of the honored dead of recent years whose names occur to all our memories, what pictures of fidelity, of devotion to its interests, of affection for all that made for its welfare, the names of Calvin Day, of Charles Seymour, of John C. Parsons, of Robert Day and of Rowland Swift, bring up to recollection. They are but some of the later members in a long line of honorable service reaching back more than two hundred and thirty years. It has been a notable succession of those who have labored for the welfare

of the Church, the material interests of which have been committed to the charge of this Society. Now that the First Ecclesiastical Society passes away, we remember that it existed only for the Church, that it was a device growing out of the colonial conditions which have ceased to be. It is no longer necessary for the welfare of this First Church of Christ in Hartford. It is probably well that the Church itself, through an appropriate committee, should take charge more directly and with less elaborate machinery, of its business affairs. But we may well think kindly and gratefully of the Society which is now to be dissolved. It has served this Church faithfully, and its memory is one of usefulness and honor.

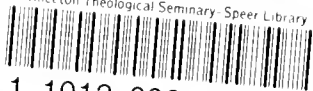






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